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ABSTRACT

Recent reports by Australian government agencies and Indigenous organizations have highlighted the failure of education systems to meet the learning needs of Indigenous students. In response to these reports and to the concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body commissioned a study of current practices in Queensland teacher education, registration, and professional development. Policy documents and reports on Indigenous education were reviewed, and interviews and focus group meetings were conducted with various stakeholders at all Queensland universities and at 27 school and community sites. Findings indicate that preservice teacher education programs in Queensland failed to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge appropriate to working with all Australian children. Most teachers begin their careers with extremely limited knowledge about Indigenous Australians and even less knowledge about Indigenous pedagogies. Universities varied considerably in the extent to which Indigenous personnel taught or helped to develop courses and in the emphasis placed on valuing diversity. Training provision for Indigenous education workers (IEWs) consisted mainly of on-the-job training by school staff; only one university had a program clearly designed and delivered for IEWs, although the Remote Area Teacher Education Program provided an alternative option for rural IEWs. Barriers to professional development in rural schools are discussed. (SV)

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Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT:

Without quality teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, teachers will not be adequately prepared to teach Indigenous learners within diverse settings. The failure to provide teachers with the understanding, skills and confidence to teach across cultures results in teachers struggling to adopt culturally inclusive, appropriate and effective approaches to teaching, In addition, teachers need ongoing support, leadership and professional
development if they are to adopt productive pedagogy and effective teaching and learning strategies and ultimately achieve equitable and appropriate learning outcomes for all students. This research project examined current programs in teacher education and on-going professional development in Queensland. All eight Queensland universities and twenty three schools across State, Catholic and Independent schools were included in the study. This paper will present the results of this research project.

Introduction

This paper considers the outcomes of a research project into teacher education, in Queensland. The Terms of Reference for the project called for an investigation of current teacher education, registration, recruitment, placement and professional development through the conduct of fieldwork research and a review of the Queensland education sectors' existing policies, commissioned reports and effective practice initiatives.

The decision to conduct research into teacher education in Queensland, was based on feedback to Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB) members, that indicated Indigenous community members were becoming increasingly concerned about the quality of education being provided to Indigenous students in Queensland schools. In many instances, Indigenous parents were voicing their concerns that many teachers, were not being adequately prepared to teach Indigenous students or had no previous experience in working with Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, in recent years, reports from government and Indigenous organisations, have highlighted growing concerns regarding the failure of our education systems to cater for the learning needs of Indigenous students. In many instances, teacher education has been cited as failing to provide teachers with the knowledge and understanding they need to teach Indigenous content and/or to establish effective teacher/learner relationships with Indigenous students.

In commissioning this research, it was not the intention of the QIECB to suggest that teacher education providers and education providers do not provide pre-service or in-service programs that focus on Indigenous education issues but rather to indicate that what is being done does not appear to be achieving the desired outcomes. It was perceived that, in talking to teachers, Principals and Indigenous community, the QIECB would be better informed to develop recommendations that will enable

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providers to develop more relevant, hence, effective programs for the future.

Literature Review

As the focus of this research was 'teacher education' as it relates to the nature and interests of the QIECB, the Literature Review focused on publications that were concerned with Indigenous education issues within the Queensland and National education policy contexts. Little was found, at either state or national levels, in the way of formal academic research in this sphere. Consequently, the Literature Review, of necessity, focused on the various Reports, conference proceedings and policy documents that dealt with this topic.

The Literature Review also provided an explanation of what is meant by the term 'Indigenous education', for this is an issue that is perceived, by Indigenous educators, to underpin much of the confusion that appears to exist in this area. Briefly, Indigenous education is taken to mean:

- Education which relates to the education of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students in terms of inclusiveness or appropriateness of overall curriculum content, and strategies that take into account students' cultural and language backgrounds; and
- Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies, which are studies for all students about Aboriginal societies and Torres Strait Islander societies.

(Adapted from National Principles and Guidelines for Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies K-12, 1995:1)

While concern for improved education outcomes for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students is a relatively recent phenomenon, the teaching of Aboriginal studies in the Australian education system has a lengthy, albeit ad hoc, and often retrospective developmental history. Despite what might seem to be an apparent clear division between the two components, the majority of materials reviewed have no such distinction and it becomes difficult to develop a chronology where Indigenous Studies and the education of Indigenous students are viewed **jointly** as comprising Indigenous education.

Methodology

The QIECB required the researchers to conduct interviews and focus group meetings with a variety of stakeholders across all sectors of education in Queensland from Early Childhood through to the tertiary sector and across all providers, Education Queensland (EQ), the Catholic Education System (CES) and Independent Schools, throughout Queensland. The QIECB negotiated the sites with researchers in order to ensure the diversity of the Indigenous education experience within Queensland could be captured in the data collection process. Hence, in this study, questions about teacher education were included in interviews and focus groups meetings conducted in 27 education locations - 24 school sites and 3 non-school sites - and in 7 teacher education sites.

A qualitative approach was used in undertaking this research, to ensure the Indigenous voice was heard. Semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings were conducted to gather data from a range of stakeholders, including students, parents, carers, etc., as well as teachers and teacher education providers. The data gathering instruments were devised to encourage respondents to discuss the issue in such a way as to provide their views, aspirations and concerns on a range of issues relating to teacher education. In this way, researchers sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues associated with teacher education that stakeholders perceived as having direct relevance to Indigenous education.

The data was analysed using the method of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Lincoln & Guba 1985:335).

Quantitative data was gathered from a range of national and statewide statistics available in various

reports and departmental websites.

Key Findings

Analysis of current preservice teacher education programs

The study found that, in all Queensland universities with the exception of Bond University, potential teachers can avail themselves of a four-year Bachelor of Education course in Early Childhood, Primary or Secondary streams. In addition, other courses offered include Master of Education, various graduate or Professional Development programs, Bachelor of Teaching and Diploma of Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, RATEP, other distance and/or online options.

An examination of the hundreds of subjects on offer, within teacher education courses, makes it appear as though there would be an opportunity, within each subject, to include an Australian Indigenous perspective. In reality, however, only about sixty subject descriptions actually state that they include specific Indigenous, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander content.

Significantly, only one of the identified subjects is a core subject. All teacher education students at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) must study Australian History in an Indigenous Context as a core unit. It should also be noted that, as a result of their 1998/99 review of core units in the Bachelor of Education (Primary), QUT recently announced that it will become the first Queensland university to make Indigenous Studies compulsory for teaching students. In stating that in 2003, QUT will introduce a compulsory subject as part of a completely revamped Bachelor of Education degree, designed to acknowledge cultural diversity and foster inclusivity, Education Faculty Dean, Professor Vi McLean, said "It's an acknowledgement that all teachers need to know something about the issues and have a basic level of understanding of the issues surrounding indigenous students." In addition, Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dennis Gibson, has indicated that all faculties, at QUT, would undertake the process of "indigenising" the curriculum (Yallamas, Courier Mail, 2002:11).

University of Queensland staff indicated that Indigenous perspectives are embedded within the subject Education Policy and Practice, through the links with the Productive Pedagogies framework that is now a part of the compulsory assessment for the compulsory subject.

Other universities do offer a number of subjects that have Indigenous content, but all such offerings are electives. So, while universities might argue that, in developing their subjects, they do take account of the composition of the population in Queensland schools and, thus, ensure that their courses do provide teacher education students with knowledge related to Indigenous students and education, the reality is that students are able to graduate as teachers in Queensland without having accessed any subjects that deal with Indigenous issues or examine aspects of teaching Indigenous students as a specific cohort.

Similarly, some universities indicated that they always involved Indigenous Australians in subject development and/or delivery, while others admitted that they had not always involved Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islander people in this process. Some universities argued that, even though they had not involved Indigenous peoples in the development and delivery of subjects within their degree programs, they considered their course did offer relevant subjects.

It was pleasing to note that many teacher educators are enthusiastically preparing students to use the New Basics framework, by adapting their discipline methodologies to reflect the integrated approach needed to ensure inclusivity. Yet, in many instances, they did not appear to have given any thought to how they were preparing their students to adopt inclusive practices while still maintaining the capacity to address the learning needs of individual students within the learning environment. Care must be taken to guard against universalising inclusivity to the point that some groups/individuals become invisible. Teachers can cater for diversity but they need to know that is what they are doing and they must be trained to be ever vigilant of their own practices in this regard.

Interestingly, a number of universities indicated that staff of the university's Indigenous support unit taught the Indigenous content in their programs. Closer examination of this issue, however, revealed considerable variation in the degree of involvement that occurred. In some institutions, Indigenous staff from the unit are responsible (and paid) for the development and delivery of whole subjects while in other universities, individual Indigenous staff are invited, from time to time, to deliver a one off, 'guest lecture'. This may amount to one or two sessions a year or, alternatively, it can mean no sessions in those years, where the particular lecturer does not see Indigenous education as a priority. In this latter situation, there is a distinct possibility that some students will receive no exposure to issues associated with the education of Indigenous students. On the positive side, many teacher educators do endeavour to include the odd tutorial or workshop on Indigenous education, within the compulsory subjects. The difficulty with this is that, in such situations, any Indigenous lecturers, having access to the teacher education students, must work doubly hard in the time allocated to them, to motivate students to select assignment topics that will allow them, as future teachers, to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of Indigenous education.

Another area in which there was considerable variation between universities, was the degree to which teacher education providers sought to collaborate with Indigenous staff based in the Indigenous support units. In some institutions, a close and co-operative working relationship has developed between staff in the two areas while in other locations, the relationship is virtually non-existent. It would seem that the degree of synergy that exists between these two bodies is often dependent upon the efforts of individuals who have recognised the value of nurturing and maintaining an on-going relationship. Staff in Indigenous units, especially those who are qualified and experienced teachers themselves, can provide valuable input to the curriculum development or review process.

In undertaking the analysis of individual subject offerings, the issue of the 'hidden curriculum' emerged. For example, in some universities diversity does not appear to be on the agenda, hence learning objectives for subjects that acknowledge Aboriginal culture (sic) in the singular and refer only to Aboriginal people, completely overlook the diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures and peoples. In another university, an English unit that provides a lecture and workshop on teaching Indigenous students is followed by an extension activity that identifies strategies for behaviour management in English classes. Linking Indigenous students and behaviour management would appear to be maintaining the stereotypes that are seen as markers of discriminatory attitudes.

An additional dilemma in relation to the delivery of subjects that contain Indigenous content, is that of ensuring that the information they provide is relevant to student needs and have a high level of interest for all students. While the use of Indigenous lecturers is important, it should also be recognised that most semester-long subjects attempt to cover a plethora of issues within a very short time. As a result, lecturers can only provide, at best, a superficial knowledge of complex issues. It is critical that teacher' expectations of student' capacity for conceptualisation and student' expectations concerning what lecturers might be expected to know, is taken into account in the development and delivery of subjects that focus on Indigenous issues.

An issue of considerable concern to the researchers, was that non-Indigenous students do not come to teacher education courses with the cultural capital necessary to appreciate concepts within Australian Indigenous societies. What non-Indigenous students often bring is a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that must be deconstructed before they can accept reality. Subjects offered within Queensland universities provide minimal exposure, with the result that "new" teachers will have no more than a superficial glimpse (if that) of their Aboriginal students' and Torres Strait Islander students' cultures, histories and lives.

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Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs)

The data would seem to suggest that the current training provision for IEWs consists mainly of 'on-the-job' training delivered by the school's teaching staff with the possibility that additional training for English literacy and numeracy skills development, might be provided by staff in EQ District

Learning Centres. Again the ACU is the only university that has a clear education program designed and delivered for IEWs. IEWs are encouraged to enrol in the Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education which includes the following subjects: Indigenous Lifestyles Past and Present; Post Colonial Contact Indigenous History and Contemporary Issues in Indigenous Studies.

The Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) which is a partnership between EQ, TAFE and JCU, has also provided an alternative option for IEWs in recent years. Level of enrolment tends to reflect the level of commitment, individual schools demonstrate to encouraging and supporting IEWs to pursue career pathways. For example, some schools encourage IEWs to undertake part-time study with paid, non-contact time, being allocated, during school hours, for study purposes. Furthermore, in some schools, teaching staff have provided additional support for their IEW colleagues, by taking on the critical role of RATEP tutor. Such synergies not only create a co-operative and harmonious work environment, but also make a positive contribution to enabling Indigenous Australians to take control of their lives and achieve their personal and community goals of Indigenous self-determination and self-management.

There were some isolated instances of IEWs being trained to provide support for students, especially in the area of English literacy development, but there did not appear to have been any coordinated effort to assist IEWs, and other Indigenous staff members, to participate in training. Within Education Queensland, this anomaly may be rectified with the introduction of the Indigenous Education and Training Alliance (IETA), which aims to promote professional development and training opportunities in line with the recommendations of the "Partners for Success" strategy.

Professional development

The majority of IEWs indicated that they need inservice and/or formal training to assist them in their roles as mentors. This is a critical aspect of the IEW role for, in many secondary schools, there exists, amongst teaching staff, a pervading attitude that Indigenous students issues should be dealt with exclusively by the IEWs, particularly in regard to dealing with and/or resolving problems of student behaviour and anger management. Currently, many IEWs are involved in case managing students in areas that they had received very little or no training - potentially exposing both the IEW and the student to unnecessary risk. Within this context, professional development was identified as a major priority.

In addition, contracts for most IEWs are temporary and set annually. Turnover is high due to the temporary nature of the position, low pay and lack of career advancement opportunities. Interestingly, the need for recognised training of Aboriginal teaching assistants/teacher aides was first raised by the NAEC in their 1981 submission to the House of Representatives and one of their 1983 objectives, was for all Aboriginal educators to have permanent position status and become eligible for promotion.

Current teacher registration requirements and practices

The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration is a state government statutory authority established under the Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988 and is responsible to the Queensland Minister for Education. All classroom teachers in Queensland must be registered through this body. In order to gain employment, however, teachers must direct their enquiries direct to EQ, the Catholic Education Office or individual private schools. The Board of Teacher Registration is for registration purposes only.

Within the context of this study one of the important functions of the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration is that it has responsibility for discussing standards of courses of teacher education with:

- employing authorities;
- teacher education institutions;

- the teaching profession; and
- the general community.

In August, 2002, the Board of Teacher Registration circulated new professional standards for graduates and guidelines for preservice teacher education programs.

Current leadership, development and support opportunities for all principals and teachers

There was some confusion in response within this section as most school staff members appeared to see support and development as being synonymous with professional development. This is an issue of concern as some teachers become very isolated in schools, especially where they feel unable to access support, due to lack of trust in the principal or other executive staff members.

It was reported that, in the past, a cooperative relationship in relation to the delivery of professional development programs for practising teachers, had existed between universities and EQ. It would appear, however, that EQ has decided to no longer involve universities in its community orientation or professional development programs.

On a more positive note, rural schools indicated that sharing of best practice constitutes an effective means of reducing staff stress and regular staff, year level and intervention meetings provide a source of valuable professional support for all teachers.

Many experienced staff in remote schools, indicated that they found conferences and the opportunity to discuss their experiences, of considerable value in overcoming the hardships of distance and isolation. Significantly, the importance of providing teachers with a thorough induction program, prior to their being sent to schools with high levels of Indigenous enrolment, was repeatedly and strongly argued by respondents. It was stated that while a "buddy" system can be established and implemented, it is not really fair on others who already have a full time load. A constant criticism was the fact that there was minimal, if any content in their teacher training courses about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children who sometimes make up 100% of their school population. Many referred to this as racism by omission, on the part of teacher education providers.

The Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) is increasingly encouraging a strong voice for the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island members. **Gandu Jarjum is made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous QTU members from across Queensland. By focusing on co-ordinating Indigenous** representation and advocacy within EQ and in promoting the creation of Indigenous teacher networks, the QTU will make a positive contribution to enabling Indigenous Australian teachers to achieve their personal and community goals of Indigenous self-determination and self-management. In promoting the value of Indigenous teachers and sponsoring cross-cultural and anti-racism seminars for teachers, they will also contribute to the attitudinal change that it would appear is needed in many Queensland schools.

Ongoing professional development and inservice requirements and their availability for all teachers and principals.

There is a perception that there is no regularised program of professional development opportunities for teachers in Queensland schools. It was implied that professional development, where it exists, is piecemeal. Teacher's comments give the impression that teachers have an incredibly heavy workload and face a constant struggle in simply keeping up to date with changes in education systems. For others, cost and travel time are prohibitive factors. A telling comment came from one principal who stated that EQ sets down five days a year for pupil free days, and everyone has to compete to get speakers, for those days. The problem is compounded by the fact that there are very few Aboriginal people and Torres Strait

Islander people who feel able to run an inservice, and it is not possible to share those few around over the five days. This is obviously a critical need for most teachers expressed an opinion that traditional teaching methods don't work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Within this context, EQ's failure to maintain co-operative relationships with universities, as a means of ensuring a range of options for on-going teacher professional development, would have to be considered detrimental to the provision of a quality teaching service. Significantly, it was suggested that teachers who were interested in Indigenous issues could pursue their interest through postgraduate studies if suitable programs were available. One of the teachers interviewed had undertaken postgraduate studies as professional development, in the area of cultural diversity. And, while some teachers implied a lack of access to information about teaching Indigenous students, such opportunities do, in fact, exist. For example, staff at James Cook University (JCU), pointed out that the School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) has, in conjunction with the School of Education, offered opportunities for teachers to undertake postgraduate studies in Indigenous Studies over the past two years. Only one person has chosen this option although a number of teachers have enrolled in postgraduate studies, directly through SIAS.

Staff attendance at EQ inservice courses is limited and occurs through individual application to the school Professional Development Committee, the school approval authority.

The Board of Teacher Registration is also committed to professional development for educators and, under its auspices, the Queensland Consortium for Professional Development in Education is a forum for all providers and clients. According to the Board of Teacher Registration Queensland (2001) Annual Report, the Consortium's current strategic roles are to:

- Advocate for professional development as a right and a responsibility of all educators.
- Promote a culture of quality professional development among teachers and other workers in education.
- Promote collaboration in professional development.
- Provide information about professional development issues, processes and opportunities.

IETA offers a range of learning development and training opportunities for all staff members of EQ and members of EQ school communities, throughout Queensland. IETA targets schools that have a high ratio of Indigenous student enrolment and communities that are working to improve educational outcomes for young people. IETA conducts projects such as:

- English as Second Language Pedagogy (ESL)
- Professional Development and Training for IEWs
- Partners for Success Professional Development and Training
- Classroom Profiling; and
- Far North Queensland Staff College and Learning Technology Projects.

IETA targets an audience that includes teacher aides and aims to employ a full range of delivery modes. IETA projects include:

- upskilling and upgrading RATEP trained teachers (up to 50 RATEP trained teachers have a three-year Diploma);
- cultural awareness and induction programs; and
- provision of professional development and training to IEWs under, and in agreement with, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

For many teachers, the pre-appointment induction will be the first point of contact.

IETA is aligned with the Learning and Development Foundation (LDF) as a Staff College with a statewide focus. The Foundation aims to reinforce the notion that staff members are the first learners in an organization. It provides support to all employees by coordinating a range of communication strategies linking individuals with learning development opportunities.

Conclusion:

As a result of reviewing reports, studying teacher education courses and conducting consultations, it becomes apparent that current preservice teacher education programs in Queensland, fail to equip teachers with skills and knowledge appropriate to working with all Australian children. Essentially, the finding here was that training for preservice teachers to teach Indigenous students is, at best, minimal. The majority of teachers begin their careers with extremely limited knowledge about Indigenous Australians and even less knowledge about Indigenous pedagogies.

Furthermore, professional development and inservice activity opportunities are scarce, due primarily to existing workloads, in-school commitments, distance and funding. Professional development occurs mostly through the sharing of best practice during staff meetings, that often have dedicated professional development time appointed. The responsibility of professional development was often seen by the principals as their domain. It was frequently stated that they felt that the onus was on them to be kept informed of departmental and curriculum developments and subsequently pass that knowledge on to teaching staff.

Likewise, support opportunities are limited although IETA is in an excellent position to establish a network of Indigenous teachers and IEWs. Conferences and sharing experiences are the most common form of support and professional development.

There appears to be a considerable gap between the knowledge and skills acquired through teacher education courses and the needs of teacher employers. Similarly, there appears to be considerable variation in the level of knowledge and skills newly trained teachers bring with them to the workplace. This is a critical concern within the context of the number of young teachers who are employed in schools that are located in remote or rural areas.

There is also a distinct lack of preservice and inservice cultural awareness training provided for principals and teachers.

From these findings and the recommendations provided by the research teams, the QIECB will make recommendations to the State and Federal Ministers for Education.

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